

Dear Friends,

Last week, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grade Reform announced that two South Carolina schools have joined its list of Schools to Watch. Blythewood Middle School in Richland School District Two and Palmetto Middle School in Anderson District One are among 124 schools nationwide to earn this prestigious distinction. Lugoff-Elgin Middle School in Kershaw County was a 2007 honoree.

The National Forum says Schools to Watch share three common characteristics. They are academically excellent – challenging all students to use their minds well. They are developmentally responsive – sensitive to the unique developmental challenges of early adolescence. Finally, they are socially equitable – democratic and fair, providing every student with high quality teachers, resources, and support.

On the average, I spend three out of five days in our schools, so I can tell you from firsthand experience that amazing things are happening in public schools across our state. Here are just a few other examples.

Moultrie Middle School in Mt. Pleasant was recently awarded the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control's 2008 Donna Bates Memorial Award for coastal environmental education activities. The award encourages schools in the Low Country to improve coastal science and ecology instructions by using the coastal environment as a teaching resource.

The National Symphony Orchestra just completed a South Carolina residency. Members participated in five orchestral concerts and more than 100 educational outreach activities. These activities included in-school ensembles, clinics, master classes, pre-concert events, community service performances, and arts education advocacy events.

Students at Chapin Elementary School in School District Five of Lexington and Richland Counties are working to create good eating habits while increasing physical activity. Boys and girls play nutrition games and participate in other hands-on activities during physical education classes. For their efforts, the school has been selected by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control as an All-Health winner for its Nutrition on the Run project.

Some of our most outstanding educators are also making news, and two of them were honored this month by the State Board of Education. Hale Edwards from Riverside Middle School in Greenville County is the 2007 National Middle Level Social Studies Teacher of the Year. The National Social Studies Council applauded her commitment to academic excellence and responsible citizenship. Dr. Traci Young Cooper is serving as one of twenty-two after-school ambassadors from nineteen states across the nation. This year, these educators are organizing public events, communicating with policymakers and building support for after-school programs.

As we accelerate our efforts to reform, support, and improve public education, these shining stars remind us that South Carolina schools have many reasons to be proud.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/news/more.cfm?articleID=907> (Moultrie)

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/news/more.cfm?articleID=914> (Symphony)

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/news/more.cfm?articleID=908> (Chapin)